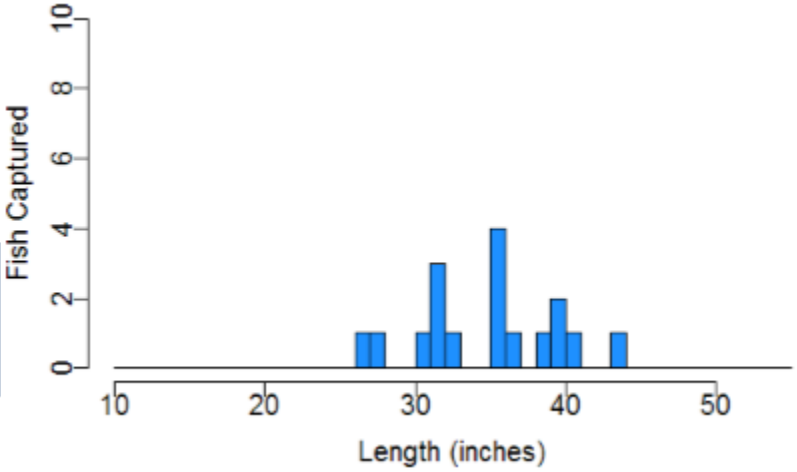
Spring Fisheries Survey Summary
Tiger Cat Chain, Sawyer County, 2019

The Hayward DNR Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on the Tiger Cat Chain (which includes McClaine, Burns, Upper Twin, Lower Twin, Placid, and Tiger Cat Flowage lakes) from May 6-8, 2019 to assess the adult walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, yellow perch and black crappie populations in the lake. Up to 14 nets were set overnight for three nights which resulted in 38 total net-nights of effort. An electrofishing survey conducted on June 12-13, 2019 documented the status of bluegill, largemouth bass, and non-game species. Over 11 miles of shoreline were shocked. Quality, preferred, and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on standard proportions of world record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

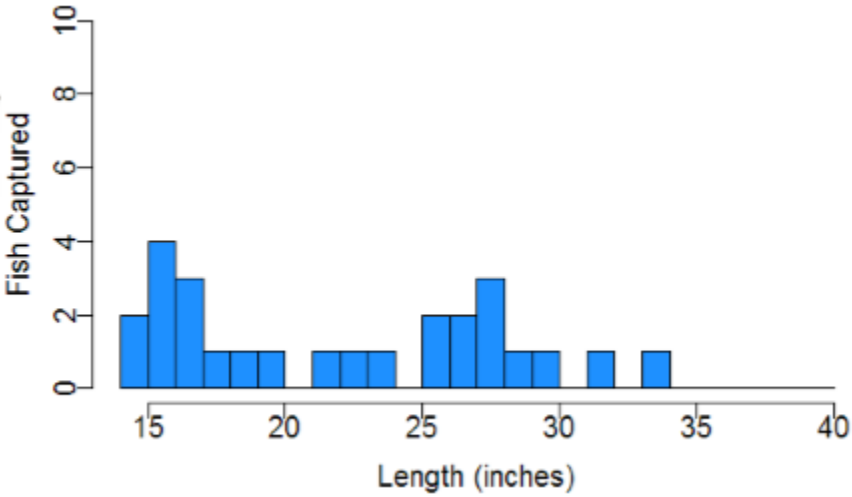
Muskellunge

Captured 0.5 per net-night ≥ 20 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 30”	88%
Memorable Size ≥ 42”	6%



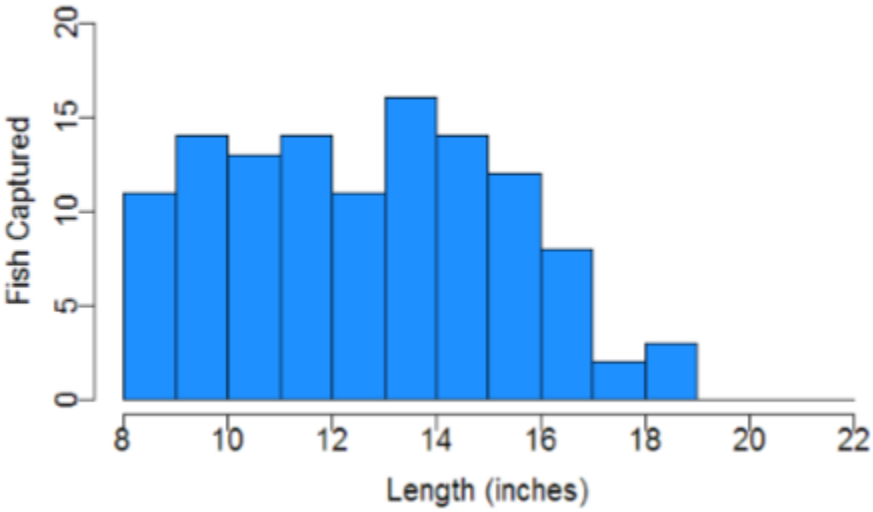
Northern Pike

Captured 1.4 per net-night ≥ 14 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 21”	54%
Preferred Size ≥ 28”	15%



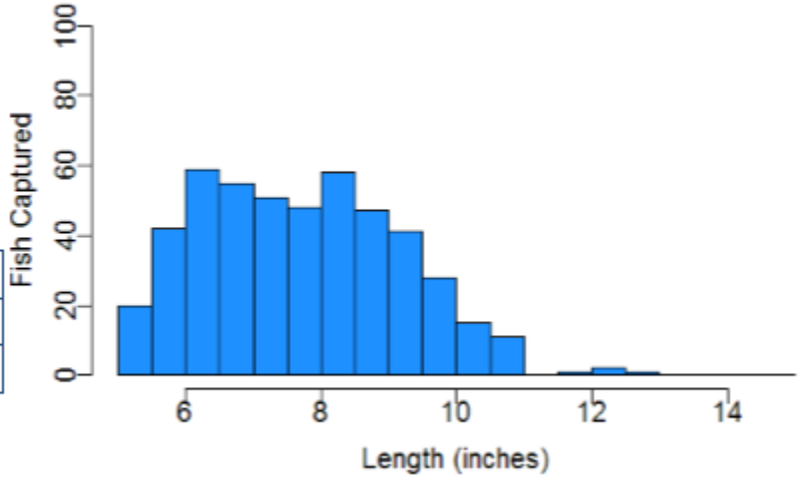
Largemouth bass

Captured 10 per mile ≥ 8 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 12”	56%
Preferred Size ≥ 15”	21%



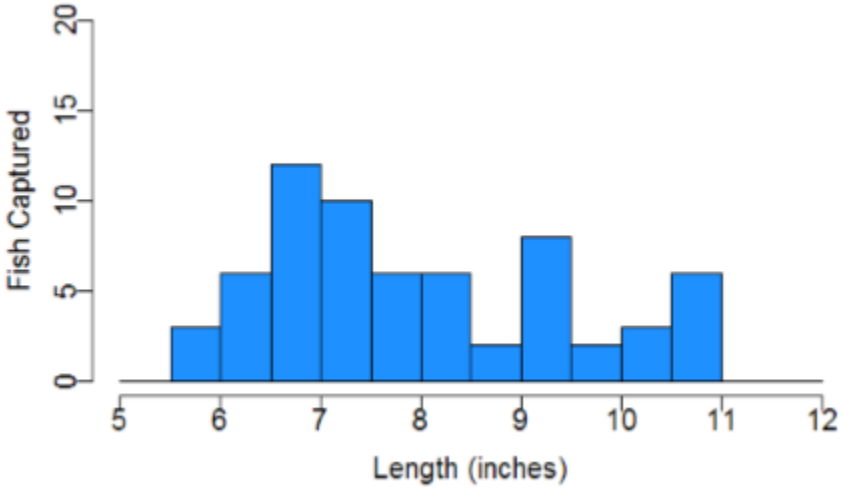
Black Crappie

Captured 15 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8”	43%
Preferred Size ≥ 10”	6%



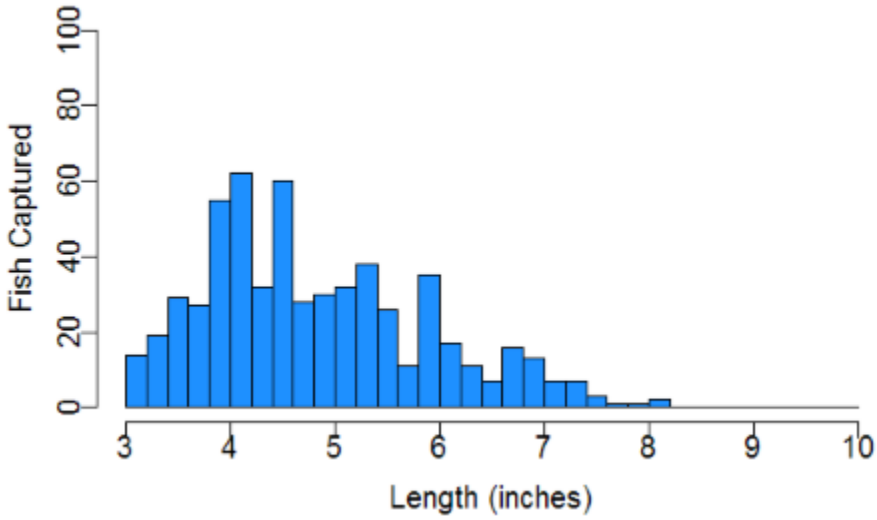
Yellow Perch

Captured 2 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8”	42%
Preferred Size ≥ 10”	14%



Bluegill

Captured 194 per mile ≥ 3 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 6”	15%
Preferred Size ≥ 8”	<1%



Summary of Results

Surveying the Tiger Cat Chain is a complex assignment given the logistical challenges of characterizing the fishery in a chain with widely differing habitat. Some lakes in the chain have clear and predominately hard bottom, while other lakes are more stained and have softer bottom and expansive boggy areas. We made sure that at least some netting and electrofishing effort occurred in each of the six lakes in the chain. This survey and report provide our best attempt to describe the fishery in this dynamic system. Note that only three walleye were captured during the survey, so statistics on that species are not included in this report.

Muskellunge are native to this lake have long been a featured species for anglers. Tiger Cat historically was known as the ultimate “action fishery” for muskellunge, where catch rates were high but size was very small. Throughout the 1900’s most muskellunge caught by anglers were 25-35 inches in length. Today’s muskellunge fishery looks very different. Muskellunge density appears to have decreased. Our catch rate for muskellunge was very low in comparison to past surveys. This lines up with angler reports from the chain. Our best understanding of the gradual decline in muskellunge ties to lower natural reproduction, on which the population had always relied. Stocking was never needed in the past to sustain a high-density muskellunge population. An in-progress Fisheries Management Plan for this chain will attempt to address this issue.

Northern pike may play into the muskellunge story as well. Pike are not native to the Tiger Cat Chain but first started appearing in angler catch and DNR surveys around the year 2000. Northern pike are believed to occupy a similar niche to muskellunge, creating potential for competition among the two related species. This survey marks the first time that northern pike relative abundance (1.4 per net night) exceeded muskellunge relative abundance (0.5 per net night). However, the relative abundance of pike at this point in time is still low in comparison to other lakes in the area. This is undoubtably the desired state for the pike fishery, given that eradication is not a feasible goal. Maintaining pike at a low density will hopefully minimize interactions with muskellunge, and will also allow for better pike growth and size, as was observed in this survey where 15% of pike were over 28 inches. Anglers are encouraged to harvest pike, while keeping in mind that the statewide 5-daily bag limit still applies. Pike captured in this survey were removed for further study of age and growth rates.

Both largemouth bass abundance and size showed moderate increases since the last survey of the Tiger Cat chain in 2015. Largemouth are a popular species in the lake, and anglers can expect many quality-size fish in the 12-16 inch range. Bass over 18 inches were rare in this survey. Smallmouth bass are exceptionally rare in the chain, and none were captured as a part of this survey.

The Tiger Cat Chain has never been known as a destination for large panfish, but our 2019 survey offered some interesting results that may challenge that notion. We observed a higher percentage of crappie over 8 inches than in past surveys and an impressive proportion of perch over 10 inches (though perch in general were not highly abundant). Both of these species may offer opportunities for anglers looking to have a fish fry. Bluegill size remained characteristically poor, with virtually no bluegill over 8 inches observed, and few eclipsing even 7 inches.

Big perch were a nice surprise in the netting portion of the Tiger Cat Chain survey. Photo by Max Wolter.

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Reviewed and Approved by